

PROGRAM: DOES ANYTHING LIKE THIS EXIST?

Next week, the Verkhovna Rada will be discussing the Government's program of action. The document met with various responses: some criticised it sharply, some welcomed it with restraint, others remained cool or silent. But no one has expressed his enthralment thus far, neither in Ukraine, nor in the West...

Last month, UCEPS conducted a public opinion poll in all of Ukraine's regions. The key question was presented as follows: "Are the present authorities capable of working out and implementing a program of action?" One-third of those polled (32.8%) believes that they are not. Another 25% suggests that "the authorities are not interested in this". How well are such tough assessments grounded? Let us take a look at the document prepared by the Government.

The Cabinet of Ministers' program of action consists of two parts: the program itself, and a list of planned events (totalling more than 100 pages). In our estimate, we conclude that the document, drafted by the Cabinet of Ministers and submitted to Parliament, is not a program. It is not even a concept, since there is no correlation between the targets and the available resources, stages, and specific indicators. None of this is to be found in the document.

What does it contain? A well-structured text reflecting some (but not all, and even not all basic) areas of the Government's activity. The document contains all kinds of things: philosophical views, biblical commandments, principles underlying the moral code of a builder of communism, rhetoric that harks back to early Gorbachev (every paragraph, without exception, suggests acceleration, deepening, strengthening and expansion). There are fresh macroeconomic innovations, elements of the theory of civil society, important principles, and simply interesting ideas. The program's authors cogitate on building warm and confidential relations between the Government and the people. And this can either refer to Ukraine, or not at all. The ideas presented are equally applicable to Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Albania, while many of them would be suitable for Germany, the US and South Korea... There are 27 pages worth of correct ideas with 22 of them being devoid of a single (!) numerical indicator. Instead, there is something in the document to please everyone (on the verbal level): support for museums, development of the information sector, social guarantees, attraction of investments, development of the Ukrainian language, struggle against corruption, public control, a conversation with the people on a confidential level with the goal of finding support... Perhaps this is all an expostulation of a certain system of values (code of conduct) for the Yushchenko government, but there is no program of action.

In this instance it is not difficult to wholeheartedly agree with the First Vice Premiere: it is high time to do away with massive programs. We have no time to either write or read them. Nevertheless, we would like to know what to expect from the Government in the foreseeable future - not ideologically, but regarding practical deeds: the nation's GDP is reported to be skyrocketing, but life is not improving.

The code-like program is accompanied by an impressive (judging by the number of pages) list of actions, but it doesn't imbue the reader with inspiration. This list of "events" refers to dozens of... other programs (national programs, comprehensive state programs, state programs simply, comprehensive programs simply, target-oriented, departmental, branch, and other programs), along with hundreds of laws, decrees, concepts, strategies, memoranda, pacts, resolutions, and other documents that the Government intends to produce. But what will come of it all? The Cabinet of Ministers' document does not relay the meaning of the innovations, i.e., the difference between the future (probably good) and the present (probably not very good) programs. This signifies that their content will come to depend not on the ideas (interests, priorities) of the Yushchenko team, but midlevel bureaucrats. And we've had enough of that. Today, there are over 200 unrealised national (state, etc.) programs lying idle on Government office desks without the slightest hope of financial support.

How can the Government be held responsible for the proposed program's execution or non-execution, given that it is so "well-designed"? Who among us is qualified to evaluate such achievements as "broad privatisation", "accelerated privatisation", "the growth of national wealth", "the provision of effective social guarantees", etc.?

Perhaps it will be possible to evaluate the rates of GDP growth, inflation, production volumes and the budget deficit, if the statistics are reliable. Those indicators are written into the program, as they are closely monitored by the IMF and must always be available.

One can stop worrying about getting excited this time around, given that none of the eight Ukrainian governments ever implemented their programs and, generally speaking, rarely mentioned them. Life is bound to go in the right direction, and the Yushchenko team will manage to improve the situation, without relying on what is little more than the program's excessive verbosity. There is, however, one disturbing point: the program's developers missed three important sectors of Government activity - foreign policy, law enforcement bodies, and the military sector. Is this because the Government is not concerned about the degradation of the Armed Forces, impoverishment of the militia, the deprivation of Ukraine's vote in the UN General Assembly, political dialogue within the OSCE framework, or its relations with NATO? Or are these issues the business of individual ministers?

The document expounds a great deal on trust, democratic principles, civil society, and care for people. Certainly, all of the document's declarations are the right ones, but we have become fed up with these words. In order to gain the public's trust, at the very least, one should speak the same language as the people. In my opinion, it would be advisable for members of the Government to refrain from quoting macroeconomic indicators in their public statements: those are better left for Cabinet of Ministers' meetings and negotiations with the IMF. People are not interested in GDP volumes. So what if the State Committee for Statistics reported GDP growth of 8.8% in February? For 90% of people, life became worse that month than it was before: housing, heating, and electricity costs went up, while the price of many products rose. The inflation index, calculated on the basis of "consumer basket" unknown to the people, keeps declining (which is apparently good), but real incomes are falling even more rapidly (which can't be all that good).

What explanation is there for leaving several key indicators out of the program that were present in preliminary drafts? Another mystery: the column "planned economic effect" disappeared from among the program's measures without a trace, although it was present in earlier versions. Either no effect is expected (which is unfortunate), or some members of the Yushchenko team are not ready to take responsibility for their actions (which is worse). There was and is no separate column "budget costs for measures proposed". How can a program exist without at least a rough estimate of the funds required?

That's why hundreds of plans are mentioned in the program which are very ambitious, but often completely senseless and futile in terms of the expected results. Allow me to cite just two examples.

The program prescribes "the full payment of wages, pensions and other social arrears". Looks fine, but only on the face of it. In essence, this is just another declaration. When exactly are these arrears to be paid, and how: to everyone all at once, or gradually, and in what order? No answer. What are the sources for the nearly UAH 10 billion supposed to be? No answer, and no funds in the budget either. Will the Cabinet of Ministers pay its debts only to budget-sustained employees (in Kyiv, the regions and populated areas), or does V. Yushchenko intend to pay debts owed to private enterprise employees? The document gives no answer, but the answer is clear. Then why such declarations? Why not set several feasible priority targets, definite terms, and accomplish them - as Bill Clinton did in eliminating the Federal budget deficit which in 1992 was calculated in the billions of dollars? Or at least take Ye. Primakov's example, who managed to fulfil his commitments to public servants and the military. That's when the reform Government will be assured of the people's support.

The Cabinet of Ministers' program proposes "the creation of 1 million new jobs". A splendid idea, but the questions remain. When will they be created? Using what funds (the implementation of those measures will cost billions of dollars)? The 2000 budget does not allocate any funds for these purposes. In what regions and branches will the new jobs be created? No answer, meaning that it will be impossible to verify this. What is the relation between these plans and a reduction of 300 thousand positions for public servants? The program is full of similar declarations without funding support and the periods for their fulfilment.

I believe that Viktor Andriyovych Yushchenko sincerely wants to improve the situation and to lead Ukraine out of its present crisis. I am in support of this courageous individual and some members of his team. However, three months have passed, and if there is no other realistic Government program, then the picture looks very sad indeed. Do all the members of Yushchenko's team realise the responsibility they assumed?

It is increasingly difficult for the President to hide his irritation; the West is also becoming edgy. If V. Yushchenko is not capable of dealing with reform, the people's belief in Ukraine's ability to overcome the crisis in a normal democratic manner will be undermined for a long time to come. The new Premiere, a sort of "strong man-manager" (some names are currently being invented), will establish "order" in the country. But will this country have a human face?

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